Besides the simple needs of life, preservation of the self 556
and the race, another motive of the Magyar folk customs is stressed by some authors: the urge to assert oneself in the society. Since wealth is the main source of respect in Magyar society, certain conventional outward signs of wealth (such as the year and make of the family car in the United States) are emphasized by many people, even to the extent that they far exceed their means in order to keep up appearances. Such outward signs of wealth are the furniture of the main living room, especially the elaborateness of the decorated bed, and the holiday attire. People who wear raga for six days of the week, may don on the seventh hand embroidered pieces of clothing whose value may exceed several months' income. Weddings are social 585 574 556
events that usually require far greater financial sacrifice than one might call reasonable. In small villages, all the inhabitants are invited, without exception, or in towns, the entire street is invited. On such occasions the peasant, who usually economizes on his food to keep his animals in better condition, slaughters, without regret, pigs, sheep, calves and even beef cattle, not to speak of dozens of fowl--all for the wedding feast. Pastry, usually a Sunday treat on the farm, is served in a wide variety and abundance.

homes. Many of them would perhaps buy these commodities today if 461
the purchasing power of their products would permit them to do so. The existence of their elders and forefathers was not a bit easier either; hard work and rare leisure is, as they believe, their natural inheritance, and, as long as this hard work provides their livelihood, they do not think of revolting against it.

The Hungarian peasants are extremely hospitable and live a 574 576
gregarious social life. Among the many customs connected with receiving and entertaining, the few selected below are only random examples:

Guests, after entering the courtyard, do not knock on the door but wait until they are noticed and invited to enter. The men shake hands. The guest is then offered a choice seat in the main living room, which is generally the one opposite the door. Each drink consumed during the visit must be toasted to someone's health. Upon leaving, the guest is accompanied by the host to a distance determined by the prestige and position of the visitor.

During the winter months, the women assemble in the evening 462 221
to do handwork or spinning. This is always an occasion to tell tales, jokes, to sing and to play games.

262 [263] sources of meat. The meat dishes (like most of the other dishes) are strongly seasoned and, for Western palates, overly rich. The most important national dishes are gulyás (goulash), paprikás or pörkölt (diced meat in a copious, rich sauce, seasoned with onions and paprika) and tokány (similar to pörkölt, with black pepper). Lardons and bacons, consumed either smoked or parboiled and salted, are the main dishes for cold meals, especially in the rural areas, where they are also the most important features of the breakfast. Today, meat and bacon are scarce. There is a wide variety of soups, hot and cold, sweet and sour, as well as mushes.

262 574 The menu of the Magyar peasant table features traditional dishes to be served on certain occasions; the most important of these are: suckling pig on New Year's Eve, goose on Saint Martin's Day, pörkölt for the mourning feast. At harvest and vintage time, mushes made with meat are commonly served. Snail soup is offered to the wedding guests in most regions of Hungary, except Transdanubia, where, on such occasions, a meat soup is served with thin noodles.

262 Foodstuffs such as cereals and fruit and vegetable juices, very common in the United States, are not used by the Magyar peasants. Sandwiches, as we know them, are not prepared, although children often receive slices of bread covered with jam, lard or honey.

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those villagers who are not the tenants or dependents of the landlord. Outside the 'big house' probably only the priest's and the schoolmaster's houses stand out a little from the rest. Even a big village may have no shop; the villagers buy what they need on their weekly visit to the local market town. There is, probably, an inn, but it is not much frequented, since each family makes its own wine. By day, during most of the year, the street is almost deserted; all the men are out in the fields, perhaps miles away. They come home in the evening, when the animals also are driven in, and for half an hour the whole place wakes up. Later, men and women sit on benches outside their doors, or in the street, under the acacias, smoking and talking. On Sunday they sit there all day, except when they are in the church.

It is a hard, monotonous life. It is monotonous even for the inhabitants of the 'big house', who are usually much poorer than they let anyone guess and often spend their lives with no bigger distraction than a little shooting or a drive over the bumpy mud roads to visit a neighbour, who is most likely also a cousin or a brother-in-law, five miles away. For the peasants, a wedding, a religious procession or a harvest festival are the great events of the year. A hard life, but not without its own charm. Few people know the Hungarian countryside. But if they do penetrate there, they will be received by landlord or by peasant, with much kindness and hospitality, and with the perfect courtesy and unfailing dignity which is equally the mark of the Hungarian gentleman and of the most ragged, barefooted Hungarian peasant.

585 bours. One must know that the Matyó stable, as they call
[29] it the «sty», is the meeting place and living room of the men. There is even a fireplace in it. It is as it were a club house of primitive people. They collect there to talk, to smoke, to fry bacon. If the new wife is in love with her husband, she soon opens the door to him when he slinks home about midnight... But sometimes he may have to wait for a whole month. And they have to be extremely careful, lest the old people should notice something. This is taken very seriously, and next morning the young couple, and especially the new husband have something to listen
[76] to... To give some sign of love before others is a grave disgrace. Sooner or later however some event will occur, and presumably the old people also know that a baby is not brought by the stork, nor does it grow on a rose-bush, as the ladies-in-waiting of the Whitsun queen say in their songs... But all this is in vain, laws are laws, and the Matyó laws are particularly strict. This strictness is the cause of all those possible «disgraces» which may befall the young couple, during the wedding celebrations, if they do not take utmost care.

Wedding customs

(A little history is mingled with this chapter)

585 The most frequent word used in connection with a
574 Hungarian wedding is the word «lakodalom» meaning banquet, that is feasting, carousing; the marriage is celebrated, the wedding takes place, but the «lakodalom» is eaten and enjoyed! The Hungarian saying: «a 'lakodalom' in the hills and in the valleys» means an entertainment which is gay, well fed and endless. Food, drink,

585 music, toasts, anecdotes, these are its ingredients. When
● 574 enough has been eaten, the effects of wine are dissipated in songs and shaken off with dancing. But it is still better if high spirits couple the two. Soon they had a slogan :

Host, have your house swept,
Have that long table carried out
And all the dishes and plates,
For dancing there shall be plenty of space !

535 Space alone is not sufficient for Hungarian dancing, it requires a great many more things. Hungarian wine is also important, and it certainly played an important part in teaching Hungarians to dance. This is what an old poem says :

We have had a good wine harvest,
It will give us full strength
And a great wish for dancing !

But even wine is not sufficient for Hungarian dancing, it takes other things as well. These essentials were enumerated very long ago by a Hungarian nun, who lived before the battle of Mohács (1526). According to her the following are the essentials for dancing : «the space shall be beautiful, wide, light and peaceful ; there shall be an abundance of food and strong liquor, the bodies of the dancers shall be beautiful, light, elegant and strong».

Naturally music is also wanted, and for some old Hungarian dances singing as well. Even in Heaven one cannot imagine — for instance — the «kállai kettős» (a renowned old Hungarian dance) danced otherwise than it is done down here, as without its peculiar music and songs it is no dance at all. «I wonder whether they dance in Heaven» enquires the Hungarian nun in her beautifully

535 written Hungarian treatise compiled not long after the discovery of America. And «what kind of sound will there be while we dance? Will there be violonists, lute players, drummers, «cimbalom» players? Yes, there will be» — she anwers with conviction, — «songs are also sung while dancing».

The German author of the «Ungarischer oder Dazianischer Simplizissimus» writes about the Hungarians in 1683, in his 19th chapter: «Practically all their dances are ballets; they dance very gracefully and neatly, not like the Germans or the French, who think such a lot about their own steps». The German artist August Ellrich, writes in his book «Die Ungarn wie sie sind» in 1830, that while dancing the Hungarians sway so beautifully, that compared to them the Fandango of the Spaniards, the Saltarella of the Neapolitans, the Mazurka of the Poles, the Waltz of the Germans and the Minuet of the French are merely grotesque convulsions. All these are a long exhibition of clumsiness, there is only one real dance, and that is the Hungarian dance. It is the perfection of grace and charm. The Hungarian dance is a bewitching marvel. «A man» — he writes, — «who has seen a woman in her Hungarian costume dance a Hungarian dance really well, and can still quickly and correctly answer the question «what is twice two?» is a man, whom I, if I were a girl, would scorn as a lover!»

535 585 74 But for this dance it is very necessary that besides Hungarian high spirits and Hungarian wine the «bodies performing shall be beautiful, light, elegant and strong». If a wedding lasted one or two weeks, — which in olden days was no rare event, — it afforded a great many opportunities for dancing. And many were provided already before the wedding; there was a dance for wooing a girl, for courting her, one for getting engaged and exchanging rings,

535 one for the vigil (when they wept over the bride) for the
585 reception of the bride's envoys and her best men; one
for the wedding banquet; one at the girl's home, at the
574 first visit of the girl's parents to their married daughter;
one when the young woman is taken to church after her first baby. The young, the old and the guests had their own dances and what is more, the invited and the uninvited guests had separate dances. During the marriage ceremony there was the priest's dance, before that the kitchen dance, the scarf dance and the present dance; the dawn-fire dance or singeing of the bride, and in some parts of the country many other dances as well. But all these varied not so much in choreography, as in mood, because the Hungarian dances offer an almost unlimited opportunity for improvisation, subject to moods and individual fancies. The bride's dance was always slow (an old poem advises the bridegroom also to be restrained in his movements). All the wilder was the dance of the uninvited guests, who had to be satisfied with one or two songs; in these the whole village, any member of it, could take part without being invited; and they did take part indeed, insisting on their right to do so.

535 The singeing of the bride occurs on the second day
585 of the wedding. It is a ceremonious dance; they dance around a fire lit in the courtyard, and the bride even jumps over it, in order to free herself of all evils, as in the fire jump of Midsummernight. At weddings the mice dance, the candle dance and the pillow dance were often performed. These were playful dances, they usually had their own tunes and songs. The pillow dance was performed to this song:

In a lonely mill
There is an oak beam,
A little owl lady
Walked sprucely along it.

book written in 1622 contains 189 recipes for the thirty kinds of fish existing in it) yet the whole entertainment is still called : — bacon roasting.

A poor man begins with one sucking pig, to end with a pig weighing a ton ; but at a well-to-do house, particularly on the Great Plain, especially if the summer workmen have to be considered besides the people making up the household, six to eight pigs are killed in one winter. Amongst poor people it is the wife's duty to bring up and fatten the pig. She cares for it, even fondles it. She becomes proud of the dear little brute ; she watches it from day to day, — how it grows, improves, puts on weight. From time to time she tries to lift it up by the tail, as long as she can cope with its weight. Gradually the animal gets «ripe», it is already in the middle of November when it refuses to eat anymore. And when Elisabeth shakes her petticoat, — that is if it snows on Elisabeth's day (the 19th of November) they kill it, unless they prefer to wait until Catherine's, Andrew's or Lucia's day, — or even — if there is no hurry — until the middle of the two Christmasses (the period between «great» and «small» Christmas, that is between Christmas and New Year).

The killing of the pig is counted as a family feast, the children do not even go to school on that day. They feast, celebrating the event of having killed the pig. But there is a great deal of work before that. Practically every Hungarian farmer is an expert at killing and preparing the pig. If several pigs are killed, the farmer calls in only his good friends and pals, and the feast is really the reward for their help which cannot be paid for with money — and it is not done otherwise.

Work begins before the light of dawn. The friends and relations come with lamps, on their shoulders they bring pitch forks, a few of them carry knives. First of all they

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must fortify themselves for this cruel work. The stone bottle makes the round, filled with plum or peach brandy.

But one has to be careful with that poisonous drink, as everyone must remain sober. After it they eat a few hot cakes, or boiled sausages if any are left over from last year, then they take a few drops of wine and off they go to work ! By the time it has dawned, the victim has already been brought back from the end of the village, where the actual killing and the singeing of its skin is done with great care and cleanliness. Gaiety and many jokes accompany the work the whole day through. At the end of the village the night wind bites through the air. A few drops of what they have been drinking in the house would be very welcome . . . But the work needs great care, therefore the host brought none of it with him. But one of his pals produces a flat stone bottle from his pocket ; with a serious face he takes a long draught from it and hands it to his neighbour. He also takes a draught, but for nothing in the world would he let out that there is only water in it . . . He too passes it on . . . Only when the bottle has got back to its owner, does someone remark : — «This is good brandy, a thousand pities that it *has not kept its currant*» ; or «*this one has never been* [illegible] *tree*» ; or «*its strength has somewhat gone . . .*»

Meanwhile everyone works at home ; water is being boiled, the pap thinned, pepper or paprika pounded, knives sharpened, firkins cleaned, fresh dish-clothes prepared . . . Everything is extremely clean, only in the air do many smells and much steam collect ; the house is full of them.

The dissecting and preparing is done with great skill, no trained butcher could do it better: They know every part of the animal, and each part is used for a different purpose ; the name of all these would make up a whole dictionary. They keep on washing their hands, their cleanliness is extraordinary.

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574 By the evening everything is ready: white and other sausages, black pudding, a pudding made of sow's maw; even lard, all salted, lies in its place. Dinner too is ready: it is the tasty sign of gratitude for the help proffered by friends and relatives, and it is also for the members of the household. The menu is: chicken soup with thin noodles, stuffed cabbage, fresh sow's maw pudding and different kinds of sausages. At wealthy houses this is followed by roast capon; the fried sweet is brought in last: doughnuts, cream cheese pudding, flead cakes or other suchlike things, and of course plenty of wine. Hungarian wine has the habit of remedying the defects of a menu consisting of so many heavy dishes.

Naturally there is no lack of toasts: the feast would not be complete without them. Plenty of songs and jokes follow as well. They praise the pig, the maker of the sausages, the cooking of the hostess and most fervently of all the wine, because it lasts until the early morning hours! In the Palóc country they often sing the old song, praising and characterising their beloved wine:

May God allow
That barrels and cellars
Pints and shops shall all be full!
All shall be as it was long ago!
The Hungarians shall never have
Spots on their pants,
Neither on their boots nor on their trousers.
This wine is a good wine,
It cheers the heart,
Makes the spendthrift,
Drives people crazy...

It is an old saying that Hungarians cheer and cry at the same time. We always had and still have a reason for dropping a bitter tear into every glass of wine we drink at a gay feast... And we shed them...

574 But never mind that ! Time is getting on, therefore let us drink Saint John's grace, and take our leave with the words of the feasters of the Great Plain :

Dear host, we are already off,
We thank you for your kindness,
And beg to leave you . . .
We have had enough
Our your food and drink,
That is why we sing hallelujah !
May God give you a good night,
You and your household,
And all your guests who are leaving !

The whipping of the Innocents

783 That is what the custom of December the 28th is called, as in most places in Hungary people whip each other on this day, though usually the men or boys whip the women. The whip itself is made of willow-twigs, but sometimes a beribboned birch twig is also used for the purpose ! The victim is supposed to become fresh, healthy and free of carbuncles. According to the ancient rite lazy wives and lazy maids get on that occasion what they would have deserved anyhow. Sometimes they get it as early as dawn, in bed, so that the whipping shall be all the more effective. The whipping lasts as long as the oration which accompanies it. For a wife it is often sufficient to say «be fresh, and next time don't answer back», but a lazy daughter or maid servant gets a much longer peroration : «you shall be fresh, healthy, you shall have no carbuncles ; if you are sent down, you shall go up, if you are sent up, you shall go down, if you are sent for water, bring wine ; if you are sent for wine,